

**Editorials  
And Comments**

**To Be Equal**

by  
Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Sickle cell disease has gotten out of hand, I refer not to the actual illness, but to the public excitement that has come to surround it.

Approximately 10 percent of American blacks have sickle cell trait, an essentially benign condition. However, if both husband and wife have sickle cell trait, there is one chance in four with each of their pregnancies that the child will be born with sickle cell anemia. Because the victims of sickle cell anemia are primarily black, the disease can result in additional discrimination against black people.

Before we get into ways in which this occurs, let's examine some of the myths that have sprung up around this once-neglected disorder.

The myth is that only blacks suffer from sickle cell disease, when in fact sickle cell does affect other racial groups. A high incidence of sickle cell disease is found in Mediterranean and North African countries.

Secondly, far too little has been done to inform the public that the mere presence of the sickle cell trait is far different from actually having sickle cell anemia.

Thirdly, there has been far too much sensationalism surrounding sickle cell anemia. The extent to which people with sickle cell anemia are affected in their daily lives has been blown up out of all proportion.

Perhaps none of this would matter much, but the publicity about the disease has frightened many blacks, as well as whites, and the passage by some states of laws requiring testing for the trait opens the door to all kinds of abuses. The politics of this disease could well become more dangerous than the disease itself.

That all this is taking place at a time of increased interest in racist claims that blacks have genetically-based low IQs or are inherently inferior for other genetic reasons, makes it especially dangerous.

It is disturbing that in some

states black children are being singled out as the only ones required to be screened for sickle cell disease. Until whites are required to take tests for genetic diseases to which they are particularly susceptible, mandatory testing of blacks is discriminatory in, and of, itself.

Through testing, a diagnosis may be made of either the trait or of the disorder, but testing accomplishes little unless it is integrated into a definitive program of education, counseling and treatment. The danger lies in the reckless use of test results which can lead to discrimination against black people. In some instances, trait bearers have faced higher insurance rates as the result of testing programs, despite the fact that there is no evidence that individuals with sickle cell trait die prematurely or are ill more frequently than other persons. Remember, the presence of the trait, alone, can be used to justify discrimination.

ban trait bearers, who are as healthy as you and I, from certain kinds of active and hazardous duty. Most airlines ground personnel with sickle cell trait. This is a dangerous and punitive trend resulting in penalties for blacks who are healthy and capable of any kind of activity.

There are other instances of abuses, enough to justify blacks calling for better understanding and monitoring of the impact of this new interest in sickle cell disease.

There is a need for a more appropriate emphasis on testing for the trait and for greater effort to be spent on

further research on treatment, management and a possible cure. The interest that has been inspired in this disorder should fade without lessening necessary financial support. The needs of the victims of this disorder should be placed in perspective to avoid usurping attention and funds for research on other diseases that affect black people disproportionately. Hypertension; for example, killed over 13,000 blacks last year, while less than 400 died from sickle cell anemia.

It is clear that black people must be wary of the hue and cry about sickle cell disease



and prevent manipulators from turning a medical problem into yet another vehicle for discrimination.

**A Challenge To College Graduates**

Black college graduates today have the unique distinction of being among some of the best educated young people of our times. It would appear that you are indeed challenged to be responsible first to the Black community and through that community become responsible to the rest of society as a whole.

For if the academic degrees you have earned after serious and diligent study mean anything if what you have indeed become means anything at all it should mean that you are now dedicated to the service of the Black community and through that community to the rest of the world.

You cannot afford to accept the platitudes by Wattenberg and Scammon as reported in the Commentary Magazine and many others who may think so that the great majority of Black Americans have put poverty behind them and have become middleclass Americans. Even now the traditional patterns of two blacks being unemployed for every one white has returned to haunt the economy. There is also the continual exclusion of blacks from an equitable share of managerial positions just to mention a few.

So, no Black college graduate can afford to ever forget that your training represents tremendous investment-Black investment-for the future.

We submit that the great majority of Black Americans are not in the "so called" middleclass; but if being a college graduate makes this a reality, then you must accept middleclass responsibilities with a deeper and more pervasive sense of responsibility, not only for your own selfish and personal aggrandizement, but that true responsibility by which all we do must be marked.

**YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY.**

When we speak of such responsibility we mean responsibility to the Black parents who have sacrificed so that you could be where you are today and the responsibility to those other Black youths who, instead of receiving degrees or "sheepskins" today, now languish behind prison bars in greater numbers perhaps than many Blacks who are in educational institutions today and even the expellees who could go no place, become college pushouts.

Remember always the revolutionary spirit of the far-reaching 60's which truly aroused the conscience of the nation with their cry of "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around"; and remembering always the wisdom of that great leader, Dr. King that "We Shall Overcome Someday."

That day can become a reality if you, the Black College graduate of today's turbulent times will become truly responsible, first to the Black community with your services and know how and through that community responsible to the rest of the greater society.

The greatest test of this challenge will be how well you and you Black college graduates - accept your responsibility to the black community first and to the greater society at large. Guest Editorial From the Carolinian.

**The Watergate Scandal**

President Nixon made a decision to face the people of this country and accept the responsibility, at least in part, for the Watergate scandal. In light of this and other recent developments, we have a few suggestions to make. We suggest the President offer any legitimate independent investigation of Watergate his fullest cooperation and support.

We suggest that the news media refrain from trying anybody implicated in the case, before they have their day in court. Leave the trial to the authorities. When the President or other high government official speaks on an issue as critical as Watergate, we suggest that network newsmen refrain from giving an instant analysis of the remarks. If opinions are formed, let the public form them from facts and facts alone.

It was a free press that brought this situation to light in the first place. With freedom goes responsibility. We hope that the press now accepts its responsibilities as willingly as it does its freedom.

Guest editorial from WSOC am-fm-tv.

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